

Parenting Support in Austria: Country Report

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Parenting Support in Austria

Country Report

Forschungsbericht Nr. 10 | 2012

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Forschungsbericht

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The Austrian Institute for Family Studies (AIF) at the Vienna University is a scientific, independent non-profit-organisation for application-oriented, interdisciplinary studies to examine the structure and dynamics of families, generation, gender and partnership. As such our interdisciplinary approach allows a broad differentiated analysis of family issues on theoretical and empirical levels, using qualitative and quantitative research methods. Besides expanding and systematising available basic knowledge on the family, the Institute acts as consultant, advises politicians and offers education and training courses.

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1 Introduction: Parenting Support in Austria

Parenting support is a broad field with many definitions. In this report it will be defined on the basis of Mary Daly's (Daly 2012) work: Parenting support is understood as the engagement of parents in activities to improve their knowledge and competence in their upbringing of their children. The aim is to empower and support parents in their parenting tasks. Parenting support involves a variety of different instruments to assist parents, such as helplines, parental education programs, counselling in one-to-one sessions, and workshops. Mary Daly suggests that parental support must satisfy at least three minimal conditions: parents are the first-line target in their role as parents, parenting support is organised in the form of services (not e.g. cash support, tax allowances, leave policies) and the focus is on parents' resources and their child-rearing competencies.

Actors and Institutions in the field of parenting support

Due to Austria's federal structure, parenting support differs decisively between the different federal states (called *Länder*). Austria consists of nine *Länder* with 98 political districts, of which 15 are cities with their own charter (statutes), and 83 administrative districts (Statistic Austria)¹. Some parental support programs are funded on a federal level through the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ), though others are funded and administered by the *Länder*. Some activities are financed privately or by the parents/clients themselves. A range of different actors play a role in the delivery of parenting support: On the one hand there are public agencies or offices, which include youth welfare offices, counselling offices run by local authorities, as well as a federal ministry (BMWFJ) website devoted to parental education. This ministry also publishes a magazine called Parent-Letters (Elternbriefe) on childhood development. On the other hand there is a wide range of private institutions and organisations offering parenting support, often with a Catholic (e.g. Katholisches Bildungswerk) or a political background (e.g. Kinderfreunde). Some of them are organized Austria wide, while others are specific to certain *Länder*, or to still more local jurisdictions.

Different fields of parenting support in Austria

Next to the variety of actors and institutions in parenting support there are also different fields in which parenting support is offered. This can be in a one-to-one setting, where parents receive advice on bringing up their children, in a workshop setting, where parents exchange experiences and reflect on their own attitudes and methods, or even in a lecture setting, where specific topics of interest are explored in detail. Parents volunteer to take part in most of these activities, though some are required (e.g. support in parenting by the youth welfare offices as a specific intervention if the child's well-being is in danger).

The diversity of programs and organizations just described, which has grown organically over centuries, makes it difficult to give a clear schematic of the full range of parenting support that is available in Austria. Furthermore, there is as yet no comprehensive report about the

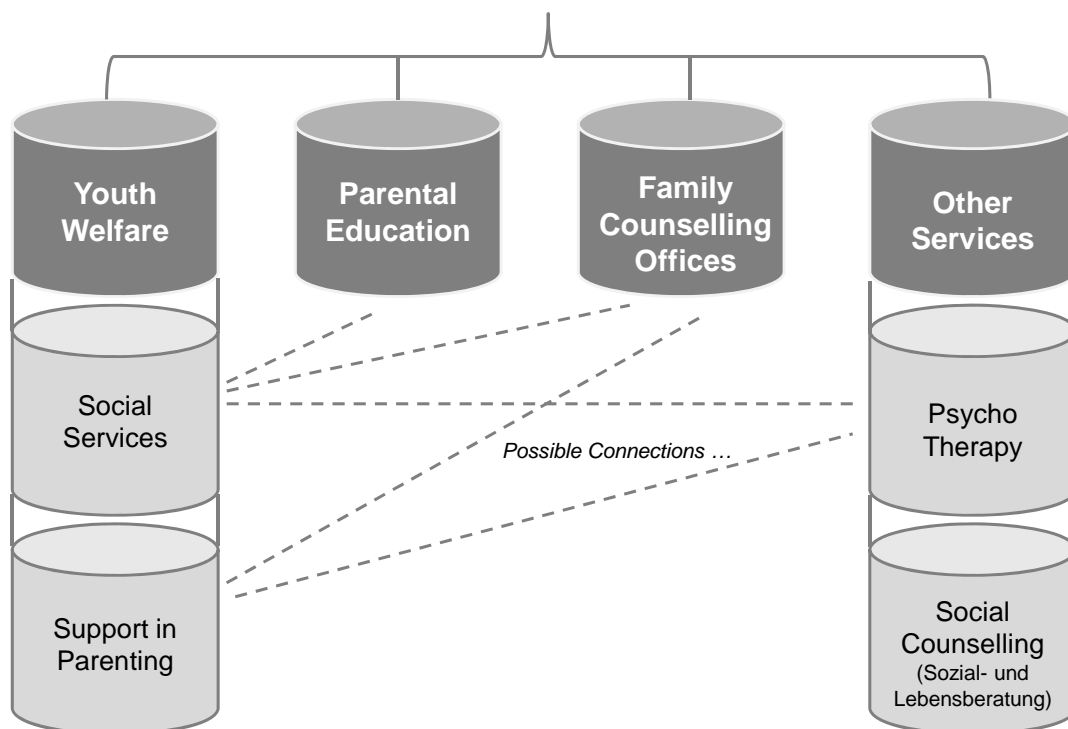
¹ See website of Statistic Austria:

http://www.statistik.at/web_de/klassifikationen/regionale_gliederungen/politische_bezirke/index.html

parental support initiatives of the various *Länder*. For this reason, this report will focus on parenting support that is funded federally and applies to the whole of Austria. In this sector there is reliable information to report.

Austria's diverse parenting support services can best be described in terms of four major pillars. They are, respectively: youth welfare services, parental education, family counselling offices, and other services, such as psychological therapy (see graphic below). The structure of this report will be based on these pillars. The decision to describe the structure of Austria's parent support services in this manner is based on previous work in this field, a review of national and international reports (e.g. family reports in Austria), as well as discussions with the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth.

Parenting Support in Austria



Source: Own figure.

As was already mentioned, parenting support in Austria is not as clearly organized as the graphic above would suggest. Several services have developed over many years, have been later adapted into various laws, and are under the responsibility of different providers. For example, several *Länder* have provided parental education since the 1950s, but parental education had only been implemented on a federal level in 1998 through the Youth Welfare Act. This leaves a wide range of possible connections between the pillars of parental support. A further example of this is the work of youth welfare offices: Two of their specific tasks, which meet our definition of parenting support, are social services (voluntary for clients) and support in parenting (obligatory for parents if the well-being of the child is in danger). Both services can either be provided through a staff of youth welfare offices (e.g. social workers, psychologists), or can be delegated to other institutions or organizations, such as sponsored family counselling offices or psychological therapists.

Discussion of the fourth pillar, “other services”, will not be prominent in this report. Since many of these services are organized on a private level, information about them is incomplete. Nonetheless, the graphic correctly indicates that they play an important role.

2 History of Parenting Support Policies

The development and the history of youth welfare is such a broad field that it goes beyond the scope of this report. Of the many aspects of youth welfare, those most relevant to this report involve social services and the support of parenting. Already in the 1970s, the working paradigm of youth welfare has moved away from conventional social welfare, to a model focused on the help and support of children's upbringing (Bundeskanzleramt 1979). The 1979 Family Report clearly states that the number of foster homes has decreased in the course of the 1970s (Bundeskanzleramt 1979). This new paradigm has been fully implemented in the fully revised Youth Welfare Act of 1989.

Youth welfare

The 1989 revisions made the Youth Welfare Act much more service-oriented and integrated an aspect of primary prevention into youth welfare work. The following social services regarding parenting support were explicitly named in the Act:

- general and specialist counselling services for children, parents and expecting parents, such as family advice and family therapy, explicitly aimed at ensuring a non-violent upbringing
- preventive and therapeutic aid for minors and their parents
- services for the early detection and therapy of deviant behaviour in children

The law's amendment in 1998 added a further form of service, which focused on parental support in terms of parent education.

At the beginning of the 20th century, psychological findings led to the opinion that mothers should get advice regarding the care and education of their children. The first "mother schools" chiefly offered courses and lectures on the care, development and education of (small) children. Not long thereafter, adult education centres were opened, and offered similar courses and lectures. With the beginning of the National Socialist dominance in the 1930s, parent education became a politicized subject, meant to help the regime implement the National Socialist concept of motherhood. After the Second World War, the original concept of parent education – to help parents in educating their children – was revived by institutions which often had a political or Roman Catholic background. For example, in 1951, 60 so-called "Elternschulen" (parent schools) were opened by the "Kinderfreunde", an organization closely affiliated with the Social Democratic Party. In 1963 the Katholisches Bildungswerk of Lower Austria (founded in 1954) established the parent school "Du und dein Kind" ("You and your child").

Parental Education

In the 1970s, what was then the Ministry of Education and Art funded a large project called "Elternhilfe". A team of experts (like psychologists and pedagogues) tried to explain and illustrate educational questions on the basis of pedagogical subject areas like "playing" or "book reading". To reach the target group (parents, but also teachers or nurses) the media, including TV and radio, were very much involved. For example, in 1976 and 1977 there was a seven part TV series on parenting. At least 500,000 Austrians watched at least one part (Bundeskanzleramt 1979).

In the 1980s, “Elternbriefe” (letters for parents) were implemented. These publications focused on development stages (“the first eight weeks”, “three to six years” etc.), or on special topics (like “single parents”, “late parents” or “parents with handicapped children”).

In 1994 – the Austrian “year of the family” – a workgroup on parent education was formed within the ministry, which led to the development of a legal basis for the financial support of parent education offerings (see chapter 3). The legal basis was not established until 2000, but since 1995, financial support was accorded. While in 1995 the budget for the financial support of parent education was about 3 million ATS (appr. € 218,000), this grew to € 1.4 million in 2012.

The federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth defines family counselling as “...*counselling in crisis situations in terms of helping others to help themselves, those offices offer also information and preventive awareness training.*” Key target areas of counselling are of pregnancy, violence in the family, in divorce and break up of relationships, reconciliation of work and family, and in the counselling of parents with a handicapped child.² Sponsored family counselling in Austria is understood as a non-directive approach to counselling (Janda 2004).

Family Counselling

Family counselling has a long tradition in Austria. With the rise of psychotherapy, a new development in the field of psychology took place at the beginning of the last century in the United States of America: the job profile of the marriage and family counsellor was created (Gössweiner 1999). The first Family Counselling office in the City of Vienna, for example, was founded in 1956. A central concern which initially motivated the foundation of Family Counselling offices was the rapid increase of divorce (Reiter 1990). The 1970s brought many policy changes to Austria, such as the reform of criminal and family law, which were accompanied by the controversial full legalization of abortion and the introduction of the mutual consent divorce (Janda 2004). After abortion became fully legalized in Austria in 1974, the government responded by creating a new source of support: the so-called sponsored Family Counselling Offices. In 1974 Austria started with 55 counselling offices with a budget of 4 million ATS, which is approximately € 290,000. In 2012 there are 390 counselling offices, which receive federal funds (€ 11.6 million) and further support from the *Länder*, local communities and other organizations.

Until the end of the 1980s, there was very little regulation of private providers of psychotherapy and counselling services, who sometimes provided support for parents in the raising of their children. No special education was required. In 1985, for example, 2150 persons who offered psychotherapy had completed a psychotherapeutic education, while 3210 others offered psychotherapy with only marginal psychotherapeutic training (Jandl-Jager 1988). As a measure of quality control, the positions of psychotherapist and social counsellor became strictly regulated by law (see “Description of the Current Legislative Framework”).

Other services

² Website of the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (www.bmwfj.gv.at) and website of family counselling in Austria (www.familienberatung.gv.at)

2.1 Current debate

A fundamental revision of the Youth Welfare Act is now being discussed. The focus is on two new judicial instruments: One involves the clarification of risk and the other is about the planning of intervention. The clarification of risk is the process that begins with coming to know whether a child is exposed to a possible risk, to the final decision that the child either is or is not at risk, and to what degree. A core element of this assessment would be the implementation of the so called “four eye principle”. This principle would make it mandatory that the decision about whether a child is at risk made by two people. Though not yet mandatory, this principle is already a part of current practice in many youth welfare offices, and experiences with it have been quite positive. Neither the government nor the *Länder* object to the content of this intervention. What discussion there is centers around the financing of such a mandatory principle. It is also proposed that the general wording of the Youth Welfare Act be adapted in a way that leads to some kind of standardization, without excessively impacting on the flexibility of the youth welfare agencies in the different *Länder*. For example, it has been proposed that decisions about which services are to be delivered by the (public) youth welfare offices, and which are delegated to private institutions, be further standardized.

Youth welfare

However, the revision of the Youth Welfare Act is of only marginally importance for the subject of parenting support.

A further important point of discussion is the shortage of staff in the field of youth welfare (see chapter “workforce issues”). On the one hand there are financial budget cuts in the social sector. Among the consequences of these cuts have been reductions in staff, resulting in more clients per employee, increased waiting times for counseling appointments, and fewer institutions which offer parenting support or work with a complex structure/method to involve parents. And on the other hand, the financial compensation in the social field is not very attractive, which also leads to a shortage of staff. For example, the median gross income per year in the welfare sector is € 22,733; in the education sector it is € 25,114, compared to € 54,354 in the energy supply sector, or € 45,162 in the information and communication sector.³

In the current debate, parental education is also seen as a **part of health care for children**. The Federal Ministry for Health has developed a so-called “Health strategy for children” in September 2011, which also includes elements of parental education. For example one important goal is to “strengthen the life competences of children and youngsters”. As one of the measures to reach that goal, “strengthening the parents’ educational competencies by supporting quality-oriented parental education” is mentioned.

Parental Education

Another debate focuses on the question where parental education should take place. There have been efforts to establish parental education at the workplaces of parents. Although the previous

Family Counselling

³ See Statistic Austria: Gross Income 2010 (checked on 7.08.2012): http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/soziales/personen-einkommen/verdienststruktur/index.html

experiences have been very good in terms of participation as well as parent satisfaction, it is still not easy to convince the employers of this concept.

Furthermore, there are initiatives to establish parental education offerings at schools. There is a new “platform for parent’s health”, which tries to connect people working in the field of parent education with parent representatives at schools.

In recent years, family counselling centres have begun to be upgraded into multifunctional centres which offer more services, for example preventative and therapeutic services. It is envisaged that these would lead to a more intensified cooperation with other providers of finances. Currently there is a special focus on the topics of pregnancy, violence in the family, separation and divorce, work and family balance and the counselling of parents with handicapped children.

An important goal within the “Health strategy for children” in Austria is to “create a basis for long-term health in early childhood”. As a best-practice-model more for therapeutic work, SAFE[®] - a training-program to support a secure bond between parents and child” is explicitly named.

Family Counselling

The SAFE[®] program was developed by the German psychiatrist and psychotherapist Karl Heinz Brisch and has been implemented in different countries such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, but also New Zealand and Australia. It addresses expectant parents up to the seventh month of pregnancy and is conducted in closed groups up to the end of the child’s first year. The SAFE[®]-training consists of four different modules:

1. Day seminars before and after birth: The prenatal modules cover for example the parents’ fantasies, hopes and fears and theoretical information on relevant subjects such as bonding and the parents’ and the infant’s competences; the postnatal modules can already refer to parental experiences with the new-born infant and cover – among others –counseling on how to deal with difficulties concerning the infants behavior.
2. Sensitivity training: Parents learn how to read infant’s signals based on video-taped parent-child interactions and can get individual feedback on their own (video-taped) interaction by trained persons.
3. Hotline: The telephone-hotline for parents is meant to be a “safe base” for the parents, enabling them to get information and support any time when they have trouble with their infant.
4. Focal psychotherapy: Psychotherapy for parents is also offered, if indications of unresolved traumatic experiences have been found.

Further information (available in German and in English) can be found on the SAFE[®] Homepage: <http://www.safe-programm.de>.

3 Description of the Current Legislative Framework

According to the Austrian constitution, the federal Youth Welfare Act describes the fundamentals of youth welfare in Austria. Details of how those fundamentals are to be put into practice are regulated in federal state regulation by each of the nine *Länder* in Austria. The concrete services are delivered by each youth welfare office in the cities or administrative districts with their own statutes, to take regional differences into account.⁴ The duty of public youth welfare (according to the Youth Welfare Act) is to provide maternity, infant and youth welfare. This includes social welfare of mothers, expectant mothers and their unborn children and infants and their parents. The age of consent in Austria is 18 years.

Youth Welfare

Other central duties of public youth welfare include the following:

- to “... promote the development of minors by offering support with care and education and granting educational measures (youth welfare).” (Art. 1 (1) 2 JWG⁵)
- “Public Youth Welfare has the general duty to advise and to support the family in carrying out its duties in the care and education of minors.” (Art.2 (1) JWG)

In chapter two of the Youth Welfare Act, the key services of youth welfare in Austria are defined in different sections, such as: social services (section 1), foster children (section 2), homes and other institutions for minors (section 3), procurement of adoption (section 4) and educational support (section 5) (see JWG).

Non-governmental youth welfare organisations can be brought in for the handling of non-governmental duties and services.

Parental education has been implemented in the Youth Welfare Act through its revision in 1998.

The financial support of parent education is based on § 39c of the “Familienlastenausgleichsgesetz” 1967(FLAG), BGBl Nr. 367/1967 idF BGBl I 136/99 (Law on the Equalization of Burdens for Families).

Parental Education

According to this act, the federal government can support institutions which offer qualitative parenting education. Parent education has to follow scientific findings (which are not specified) and has to be carried out by experts. The federal government can contribute to the training and further education of experts, and can carry out awareness-raising measures. Since the year 2000, institutions offering parent education can apply for financial support based on guidelines developed by the former Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family. The intention of these guidelines is to guarantee parent education of a high quality, to enhance a non-violent parenting and to prevent difficulties in parent-child-relationships and in partnerships. A further goal is to reach parents of all educational classes by low-threshold offers. Only non-profit organizations can benefit from the funding.

⁴ Website of the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth:

<http://www.en.bmwfj.gv.at/Family/YouthWelfare/Seiten/default.aspx>

⁵ JWG (Jugendwohlfahrtsgesetz), translates into: Youth Welfare Act.

The guidelines also list in detail what kind of parenting education will be supported, what contents are to be included, and what the general prerequisites are. According to these guidelines, the following educational strategies are supported:

- Courses which are organized as a series of events for a consistent group of parents (e.g. each Tuesday evening), containing elements of information, self-reflection and exchange of experiences. A further prerequisite is that these courses deal with at least one of five life stages (pregnancy/birth, children aged 0-3, 3-6, 6-10, 10+) and that they contain a number of basic themes like child development, ways and goals of education, health, conflict management within the family etc...
- Activities to motivate and inform parents about parental education
- Continuing courses and lectures which expand on the material of the basic courses.
- Education within the framework of parent-child-groups
- Networking
- Training, supervision etc... of the staff (e.g. course instructors)

Offerings that focus exclusively on leisure and on the field of youth welfare and family counseling are excluded from financial support.

A federal act on the support of family counselling offices (Familienberatungsförderungsgesetz, BGBl Nr. 80/1974) had become law on the 12th of February 1974. In this act it is stated that the federal government can support *Länder*, communities, other public legal entities and “artificial persons of private law” to offer family counselling. The counselling has to be free of charge, but voluntary contributions are welcome. It is mandatory for the family counselling offices to offer counselling in family planning and for expecting mothers with social and economic needs, as well as other topics. Furthermore, the family counselling offices should offer counselling in family, partnership and sexual matters.

Family Counselling

The federal act on the support of family counselling offices has been subject to two reforms, in 1988 and 1997. Especially the reform of 1997 includes major new regulations. These include the following:

- Family counselling offices are allowed to ask for voluntary contributions.
- A medical doctor is not any longer mandatory as staff in a family counselling office.
- The regulations on secrecy are the same as those in psychotherapy.

In international comparison Austria could be considered a pioneer in the protection against violence in the family. This protection against violence happens in different ways: The first step to ban violence in the family was done in reshaping the Federal Act for Children (Kindschaftsrecht) in 1977 by abolishing the right of parents to beat their children (in force since 1811). Another step in that direction was the reform of the Kindschaftsrecht in 1989, in which Austria introduced an absolute legal prohibition against violence in childrearing – as the fourth country worldwide,

Excursus: Violence

after Sweden (1979), Finland (1983) and Norway (1987). (see Kapella 2010; Kapella 2011; Haller 2010)

A milestone for a non-violent society was set by the introduction of the Federal Act on Protection Against Domestic Violence, which entered into force in 1997 (Gewaltschutzgesetz⁶). The rules against domestic violence are anchored in three different acts: The Security Police Act (Sicherheitspolizeigesetz), the Enforcement Code (Exekutionsordnung) and in the Civil Code (Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch). The Second Act on Protection Against Violence entered into force in 2009 (Zweites Gewaltschutzgesetz – 2. GeSchG), and further strengthened the protection and support of victims of violence. (see Kapella 2010; Kapella 2011; Haller 2010)

As mentioned previously, until 1990, different providers with completely different educational backgrounds could offer “psychotherapy” and “social counselling”.

Other services

In 1990 the “Psychotherapy Act” (BGBl. Nr. 361/1990) was passed, which came into force in 1991. This law strictly regulates the educational prerequisites for those who are allowed to work as “psychotherapist”, and also defines the duties of this profession (for details see “workforce issues”).

The legislative development of the social counselling profession was rather similar. Until 1988 social counselling was an unregulated trade, and practitioners did not need any specific certification or experience. In 1989 the “Social Counselling Act” (BGBl.II 140/2003) was passed and social-counselling became a regulated trade that requires certain qualifications (see “workforce issues”). Unlike a psychotherapist, a social counselor is only allowed to *counsel* a (healthy) person, but not to *treat* (mentally) ill people.

⁶ Bundesgesetz zum Schutz vor Gewalt in der Familie. BGBl No 759/1996

4 Service Delivery Arrangements

4.1 Responsibility

Youth welfare plays a key role in Austria's parenting support. As described under the legislative framework, the fundamentals of youth welfare in Austria are regulated in the federal Act for Youth Welfare.

Youth Welfare

The responsibility is on the level of the *Länder* in Austria. The concrete services are delivered by the local youth welfare offices (organisation-units) in Austria's 98 political districts. Overall, there are 116 youth welfare offices in Austria.⁷ The number in each of the *Länder* varies from 5 in Vorarlberg to 25 in Lower Austria.

The federal Act for Youth Welfare defines key responsibilities and areas of operation, most of which do not meet with this report's definition of parental support. For this report, the sections on social services (section 1) and educational support (section 5) are the most relevant aspects of the services of youth welfare in Austria. Social services, for example, explicitly name parental education and general and special consultation services for parents as one of the areas of operation. All of those services are always offered to parents on a voluntary basis. This is in contrast to educational support (section 5), which is obligatory for parents if their child's well-being is in danger. Educational support in this section is among others understood as counselling and the promotion of the educational potential of the family.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a drift from mainly public to private institutions carrying out youth welfare. While in 1992 70% have been public and 30% have been private, it was the other way round by 1999. The JU-Quest⁸ (see chapter "regulation, certification and evaluation tools") of 2006 showed that the collaboration and communication between public and private institutions is regarded to have improved substantially (Putzhuber 2010; JU-Quest).

The field of parental education is rather heterogeneous and decentralized in Austria. In understanding the responsibility for parent education, it is important to distinguish among the federal level, the provincial level (nine *Länder*) and the institutional level (the institutions offering parent education courses). The Ministry for Economics, Family and Youth (BMWFJ) sponsors institutions which offer parent education and it does quality control by connecting the sponsorship with quality criteria, and by offering a curriculum for parent education institutions. The 2012 BMWFJ budget for parental education is €1.4 million. About 80 institutions offering parent education have been funded in 2012.

Parental Education

It can be said that each of the nine *Länder* has got its own parent-education "ecosystem": in some *Länder*, one or only a few big institutions are dominant, whereas in other *Länder*, there are predominantly a number of small institutions. Due to the federal structure, each of the nine *Länder* has its own way of implementing parental education support and taking over responsibilities. In each of the "*Länder*" there is some kind of financial support for the subject

⁷ Information provided by the department of the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (Mai 2012).

⁸ Online-Questionnaire for Experts in the field of Youth Welfare, conducted yearly since 2002. Description see chapter 4.4 (regulation, certification and evaluation tools).

“parental education”, but it differs between the “Länder”. For instance, in Upper Austria socially disadvantaged parents (on the basis of their household income) get vouchers for parent education offers for free (4x20€). In Styria parents also get vouchers (4x5€), but these vouchers are given independently of social criteria. In other “Länder” the sponsoring of institutions offering parental education is the main responsibility.

Furthermore, the degree of centralization differs between the Länder – for example, in Styria there is a “network of parent education”. This is a group of all accredited institutions offering parent education in Styria and is coordinated by the “Familienreferat Steiermark” (Styrian Family Council) which is part of the Styrian provincial government. In another province, Burgenland, one of the main organizations for parent education (“Burgenländisches Volksbildungswerk”) has launched the project “Network parent education in Burgenland”. In other provinces the degree of centralization is low (e.g. in the province Carinthia).

Parental education is offered by a variety of agencies, such as family organizations, often with a Catholic (e.g. “Katholisches Bildungswerk”) or political background (e.g. “Kinderfreunde”), but also by communities, adult education centres, schools or private individuals. The website “www.eltern-bildung.at” lists 276 institutions and private individuals that offer parental education (as of June 18th 2012). The number of different providers varies from 12 in Salzburg to 62 in Upper Austria. Some providers are mainly focused on parent education; for others, parental education is just a very small part of the services they offer. Some of the (bigger) institutions do not only provide lectures and courses for parents but also for their staff. Some kind of internal quality control is also done by several institutions.

Family counselling offices are well spread throughout Austria and are advertised through a special website – www.familienberatung.gv.at.

Family Counselling

Austria now has at least 397 family and relationship counselling offices nationwide, plus 80 counselling offices located at district courts. The number of the offices in the Länder varies from 14 in Vorarlberg to 92 in Lower Austria respectively Upper Austria. The sponsored Family Counselling Offices are run by 180 different agencies.⁹

- 13 agencies are run by federal, state or municipal authorities, with 39 locations
- 19 agencies are church-based, with 100 locations
- 148 are private agencies, with 258 locations.

The most relevant "other services" for the purposes of this report, which make up the fourth and final pillar of Austrian parental support, are psychotherapy and social counselling (Sozial- und Lebensberatung).

Other services

Both are based on private providers but differ in the way they are organized. At the moment there are 3,837 active social counsellors in Austria (including nutrition and sport counsellors) and another 2,585 that are inactive.¹⁰ Furthermore, there are 7513 registered psychotherapists. There is no detailed information available how many of these are active

⁹ Information provided by the department of the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (May 2012).

¹⁰ Information from the Austrian Economic Chambers in June 2012.

and how many are inactive, but nearly 3,000 are members of the BÖP (professional association of Austrian psychologists).¹¹

4.2 Main types of services

There are 116 youth welfare offices in Austria at the moment. As mentioned before, parenting support, social services and educational support (as defined in section 1 and section 5 of the Youth Welfare Act) are the most relevant aspects of youth welfare that is provided in Austria.

Youth Welfare

According to the Youth Welfare Act, section 1, social services shall specifically consist in

- general and special consultation services for parents to be, for minors and for those holding parental responsibility for them, specifically in order to promote nonviolent education and protection of minors, i.e. the services of family-advice centres, family-therapy, children's protection centres
- preventive and therapeutic assistance for minors and their families
- assistance with child care minors, i.e. mother-child-apartments, day-nurseries and child-minders
- establishing institutions for the early diagnosis of deviant behaviour of minors, in order to provide assistance to parents, persons with parental responsibility and minors
- foster care in families, homes and other institutions, particularly children's communities and social-educational flat sharing

In section 5 of the Youth Welfare Act educational support is defined as support with education, including:

- counselling of those with parental responsibility and of the minor
- the promotion of the educational potential of the family, particularly with the objective of implementing non-violent education
- the promotion of the minor's development
- supervision of the minor in groups
- attendance to the minor after dismissal from residential care

With the implementation of the JWG 1989, the collection and analysis of statistical data regarding youth welfare activities were introduced. Unfortunately these data do not add much to our information about, e.g., the social background of the clients. From the data of 2011 we know that 1,524,973 minors (0-18years) lived in Austria, of which 27,267 (1.79 %) got educational support in 2011. Only in 360 out of these 27,267 cases was this educational support was obligatory (ordered by court). Approximately one quarter of the children whose parents got educational support were 0-5, one half were 6-13 and another quarter were 14-

¹¹ Information provided by the Austrian Association for Psychotherapy.

18 years old. Male children were disproportionately represented (e.g.: 0-5 years – 2925 female and 3355 male children) (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft 2012).

Until 2001, statistical data regarding the reasons for using youth welfare services had also been collected. In 1999 (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft 2012):

- educational problems
- a bad financial situation
- behavioural problems (of the child)
- divorce/separation
- illness and death of parents
- alcohol abuse (by parents)
- maltreatment of children
- homelessness
- sexual abuse of children
- substance abuse (by parents)

In Austria, parental education is mainly implemented in terms of activities for parents like parent education courses, parent-child-groups and lectures for parents. One of the main principles of parent education in Austria is that participation is voluntary. Unlike in other countries, nation-wide concepts and programmes (like “Starke Eltern, starke Kinder“ in Germany) are not common in Austria.

Parental Education

The Roman Catholic Church, with its centres for adult education, is the most important provider of parent education in Austria. Nearly 15% of all educational offerings of these centres - which means about 4,500 activities - deal with parent education. About two thirds of the parents (about 64,000) who make use of parent education services attend lectures, workshops, etc., provided by a Roman Catholic institution such as the “Katholisches Bildungswerk” or the “Caritas”. The Roman Catholic institutions have created the “Marke Katholische Elternbildung”, which is a network of these institutions in the whole of Austria, independent of provincial borders.

Their main instruments of outreach to their target group are flyers and brochures. In a survey of 40 institutions offering parental education courses, these advertising materials were named by all (Bucheberner-Ferstl 2011). Furthermore, two thirds of the polled institutions explicitly named an electronic means of advertising (such as newsletters or a homepage). About 50 percent use local media (chiefly newspapers) to advertise their services. All these institutions cite direct communication with parents and “word of mouth advertising” as the most effective way of reaching parents and motivation them to take part in parental education.

On the federal level, the last big awareness campaign on parental education took place between September 2001 and September 2002. The following activities were a part of this campaign (Rülke 2004):

- A logo was developed which can for instance be found on all advertisements of parental education sponsored by the federal government.
- A mailing action to one million private households, as well as to schools, kindergartens and physicians, about the benefits of parent education.
- A telephone-hotline was opened
- A number of press conferences in different Austrian regions were conducted
- Information about parent education was placed in several media outlets (e.g. local newspapers)
- A Website (www.eltern-bildung.at) was launched. On this website parents and people working in the field of parent education can get various information about education and parenting in general, and it also includes a calendar of events on parent education in each of the “Länder”. The “letters for parents” (see “History of parenting support policies”) can also be found on the website. Since 2001 there have been two site-relaunches, but the website is still one of the main public relation tools on parent education run by the Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth. While in 2001 the website was accessed about 1500 times a month, that number grew to 30,000 by 2012.

Currently between 90,000 and 100,000 parents take advantage of parent education services that get financial support from the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth. This would be about 8 % to 9% of the main target group (parents with children up to 15). In 2005 this number was about 5%, which indicates that in Austria the importance and the acceptance of parent education has risen considerably during the last seven years.

The service in family counselling offices is free of charge as a rule, to assure that help is guaranteed for everyone. Voluntary contributions are often welcome, since the financial support of the Ministry covers only the cost for staff.

Family Counselling

The annual counselling sessions have been doubled from 1988 (200,000 sessions) to 2008 (493,000 sessions). Currently an annual budget of € 11.6 million is made available from the budget of the Family Equalisation Fund¹². Next to the general family counselling, the financial support by the Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth is targeted at the counselling in the following areas:

- on pregnancy and issues for family planning
- on divorce, right at country courts
- the prevention of violence in families
- on sect's

¹² See also Website of the Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth.

<http://www.en.bmwfj.gv.at/Family/CounsellingAndInformation/FamilyCounsellingOffices/Seiten/default.aspx>

- families with a handicapped family member¹³.

In the year 2010 231,000 clients made use of the opportunity for counselling. They required 487,000 counselling sessions (317.000 single settings, 40,000 couple setting, 18,500 family setting and 6,800 group setting)¹³.

Family counselling covers a broad range of topics, such as child-rearing, family planning and birth control, physical problems, issues specific to single-parenting, intergenerational problems, and conflicts due to unwanted pregnancy. Three quarters of the counselling in 2010 was on following topics¹³ (see also Dimmel 2010 for the year 2007):

- Breakup of relationships, divorce, visitation right, maintenance (16,9%)
- Child-rearing, child-care, school, detachment from children (15,4%)
- Conflicts within a partnership, communication, role allocation, sexuality (15,1%)
- Psychological (mental/emotional) problems (10,8%)
- Violence within the family, abuse, maltreatment (8,9%)
- Pregnancy, contraception, planned child (6,3%)

The topics of breakup and divorce, conflicts within a partnership and the counselling in the field of child-rearing together cover almost 50% of what is discussed in sponsored family counselling offices¹³.

Those figures make it very clear that family counselling offices play a central part in supporting parents as they bring up their children.

Two third of the clients of the sponsored family counselling offices are female (69%) and one third (31%) are male clients. Half of the clients are aged between 20 to 49 years of age¹³.

Social counselling is mainly offered in private offices, but also in counselling centres. The field of social counselling is wide-spread. Parenting support is done within the framework of educational counselling and family counselling in general, among others.

Other services

Probably only few of the social counsellors and psychotherapists concentrate exclusively upon parenting support. On the other hand, people who go to a social counsellor or to a psychotherapist often seek for support regarding several aspects of their lives, and parenting can be one of these aspects.

A very practical example in the area of social counselling would be *Fit for kids*. This company was founded 2001 with a focus on the training of social counsellors especially in the field of parenting support. *Fit for kids* also runs a counselling office and a 24 hour online counselling on questions about raising children¹⁴.

¹³ Information provided by the department of the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (Mai 2012).

¹⁴ For more information see website: www.fitforkids.at

4.3 Workforce issues

The Youth Welfare Act of 1989 assigns the responsibility for the Public Youth Welfare to the competencies of the *Länder* (§ 4, 1 of the Youth Welfare Act 1989). In terms of professional requirements, the provincial legislation must guarantee that the Public Youth Welfare is carried out by suitable personnel and, where necessary, specialized personal must be employed. The provincial legislation must also provide for the further training required and the work must be granted under the consideration of recognized scientific discoveries (§ 6 of the Youth Welfare Act 1989).

Youth Welfare

In practice, it is mostly social workers who provide broad parenting support, while specific tasks are handled mainly by psychologists. Since 2001, universities for applied science offer a fully accredited degree program in Social Work, in which students complete either a Bachelor's or Master's degree.

The guidelines for sponsoring say that "...the institution requesting financial support has to prove that it possesses the necessary financial, professional and organisational requirements for the execution of the parent education project". So in addition to financial and organisational matters, the qualification of the staff is an important prerequisite for funding.

Parental Education

In Order to qualify to work in the field of parent education, the practitioners must either have adequate professional experience (as psychologists, pedagogues, parent educators, etc.) or have passed a training program with a curriculum focused on parent education.

This curriculum was developed in 2004 by order of the former Ministry for Social Security and Generations. It was adapted in 2008. Its goal was to create general quality standards for parent education in Austria. Institutions providing this curriculum for the training of their parent educators can get a seal of quality.

To get the seal, institutions have to submit an application at the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ), consisting of a pedagogical concept for a training course (up to 20 participants) according to the curriculum. A number of specific topics (such as developmental psychology, communication and conflict settlement, organisation of parental education offerings, etc.) with a given amount of teaching units have to be covered. For example, 13 teaching units are attributed to the topic "introduction into adult education and parental education". The leader of the course has to demonstrate competence and experience in the field of parent education as described in the "guidelines for sponsoring".

Furthermore, the concept has to be presented and explained at a hearing in front of a commission established by the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ). If the commission furnishes a positive opinion, the seal is provided for five years.

As of 2012, 24 concepts from 19 institutions and countless training courses have been certified (an actual statistic on the training- courses is not available right now). The curriculum consists of two stages ("parent-child-group-leader" and "seminar leader") and comprises a total of 500 instruction hours. In the first stage, at least 150 hours have to be completed, which should lead to a basic knowledge on parent education topics. 20 hours of

practical training are included. Graduates are able to lead parental education courses (such as lectures held by experts in a specific field of parent education but also parent-child-groups) and deal with the group dynamics. They are able to organise and to solicit parent education courses and to conduct them together with experts, such as psychologists.

The second stage consists of 350 hours of education, including 60 hours practical training. A graduate is able to conduct parent education courses regarding didactic aspects as well as deciding the content of the course. He or she can lead a group of parents and promote their individual responsibility as a mother or father. He or she can define aims of the group and can use discussion to tailor the course content to the group members. Furthermore he or she is able to prepare lectures on the basis of relevant scientific literature (for example concerning educational science).

People with relevant professional practice may skip the first stage and can start with a modified version of the second stage. These “relevant professions” include school and kindergarten teachers, psychologists, pedagogues, psychotherapists, qualified social education worker and social counsellors. The cost for the training courses varies, as does the financial sponsorship for the courses provided by Ministry, which can reduce the costs for the participants. (Not all institutions apply for sponsorship.) Total costs for the participants can vary from few hundred to several thousand Euros, depending mainly on financial sponsorship, and on whether they complete only the first stage or the full program. For example, the “course for intercultural parent-child-group-leaders” (covering the first stage), held by the “Kinderfreunde Wien”, costs its participants € 300. Another course held by the “Katholisches Bildungswerk Steiermark” for people with professional practice (stage 2) costs about € 900.

(For more information on the quality seal and the curriculum, check following website: http://www.eltern-bildung.at/service/adressen_und_infos/quetesiegel/).

In Austria, about 50% parent education of the staff began with previous relevant professional experience; some of them have additionally completed the “seminar leader” stage of the curriculum. The others are “parent-child-group leaders”, as defined by the curriculum. Only very few staff members are wage earners at an institution offering parental education; in most cases wages are only paid for administrative staff in very big institutions. Most are self-employed and receive fees for conducting courses and seminars, often for various institutions. A feature attractive to many of the course leaders is the freedom and flexibility that this system provides. The amount of financial compensation has been named as a disadvantage: Parenting support is often a side-line, and it is not easy to make a living entirely from parenting support work.

According to the federal act on the support of family counselling offices (Familienberatungsförderungsgesetz), each counselling office has to have at least one counsellor available who has finished training and become publicly accredited as a social worker or as a family counsellor.

Family Counselling

The federal act also names other professions which could comprise the multidisciplinary team of the counselling offices, which are: medical doctor, lawyer, psychologist, pedagogue, psychiatrist and family and youth sociologist. Legal entities have to certify the relevant qualification of the persons who are involved in offering counselling.

Most of the counselling centres work with an interdisciplinary team which consist of professionals with a variety of different educational backgrounds, such us social workers, marriage and family counsellor, psychologists, psycho-therapists, educationalists, lawyers and medical doctors. For example in 2010: 51% of the counselling sessions where done by social workers or family counsellors, 22% by psychologist, 11% by pedagogues, 8% by lawyers, 3% by psychiatrist, 3% by medical doctors and 2% by sociologist¹⁵.

Psychotherapy and social counselling are based on different educational prerequisites. Social counselling is defined as a trade (Gewerbe) which has to be registered. An academic education is not necessary. All who work as a “social counsellor” must instead graduate a social counselling course (relevant previous educations can be taken into account). The course has a minimum of 584 instruction hours and costs about 8,000 €. Gradates must also complete a practical portion, which consists of at least 650 additional hours, of which at least 100 are supervised. The course lasts five semesters and the whole education takes between three and five years.

Other services

The psychotherapeutic education begins with a so-called “Propädeutikum” which is a general education in psychotherapy. This portion takes between two and three years. There is a theoretical part of 765 hours and a practical part of 550 hours. After finishing their Propädeutikum, psychotherapy students begin the so-called Fachspezifikum, in which they chose a psychotherapeutic school on which to focus. The theoretical portion of the Fachspezifikum is an additional 300 hours, and the practical portion is 550 hours. The costs for a psychotherapeutic education can be up to 60,000 €, depending on the therapeutic school.

Unlike family counselling and parental education which, is financially supported by government and therefore very cheap or provided at no cost, psychoanalytic services are much more expensive (about 70 € to 150 € an hour). In the case of a severe mental illness (depression, anxiety disorder and similar) the cost can be (at least partly) refunded through health insurance.

4.4 Regulation, certification and evaluation tools

Aspects of quality control are mainly defined within the guidelines and implementations acts (“Ausführungsgesetze”) of the *Länder*. For example, the Styrian Implementation Act (2005) or the “Guidelines for Achievement-orientated and Quality-orientated Control in the Field of Educational Support in Upper Austria” (2008) can be named as examples. These quality guidelines direct the manner in which social services should be offered and organized (e.g. staff requirements, documentation).

Youth Welfare

Since 2002, the so-called “JU-Quest-expert-interviews” are conducted every year. Experts in the field of youth welfare (people involved in the delivery of services as well as academic

¹⁵ Information provided by the department of the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (Mai 2012).

experts) get an online questionnaire in which they are asked to describe their experiences. In 2008, 91 out of 234 experts returned the questionnaire.

The goal of this survey is to collect impressions of developments regarding Youth Welfare in the whole of Austria, independent of institutional or provincial borders. Each year there is a focus on a specific aspect – for example, in 2004 it was financial matters (financing youth welfare offers), while in 2008, it was the administration and the division of responsibilities between the Federation and the “Länder”.

From the JU-Quests we know that there have been several changes within recent years. The number of clients with a migration background has increased, as has the number of clients in general. Furthermore, the topic “school” (e.g. truancy) has become a new important field of intervention (Putzhuber 2010).

Also the EQUAL development partnership “Donau – Quality in Inclusion” has been launched in Austria to develop quality criteria in social work. It is a network of different universities and organizations which is sponsored by European social funds and the Federal Minister for Economy, Youth and Family and the Federal Ministry of Employment in Austria. As mentioned before its main aim is to develop quality criteria for the area of social work using individual scopes of activities on the EU-level. Further, the partnership reflects on procurement law for social organizations, to lay down principles for identifying the “best bidder”, as opposed to the “cheapest bidder”.¹⁶

In order to qualify for financial support, institutions that offer parent education must satisfy many prerequisites (e.g. staff training), the goal of which is to insure a high quality of services. As mentioned previously, the curriculum for parent educators is also seen as an instrument to create quality standards.

Parental Education

Furthermore, since 2008, the federal government organizes an annual conference in Salzburg (middle of Austria), dealing with current topics (such as Patchwork-families, new media and migration). About 100 parent educators and representatives of the parental education institutions attend these conferences, which can be seen as some kind of advanced training.

A number of institutions have additional self-imposed quality standards and internal evaluation tools (e.g. the “Katholisches Bildungswerk Steiermark”).

In 2006 the Austrian Institute for Family Studies (University of Vienna) conducted an “evaluation of parental education activities in Austria”. The main goal of this evaluation was to get a good outline of how the supply is organized on the one hand and which desires the parents have on the other hand. In this study the institutions offering parental education courses, which were getting financial support from the Ministry, were asked about the services they have supplied. In the period from July 2004 to June 2005, 42 institutions with 1877 offers were analyzed. Additionally in 2005/2006 more than 3000 parents attending parental educations courses where asked about a number of topics, for example their motivation to attend a course and what they considered to be the ideal conditions for such courses (when, how long, how often, where, desired contents, etc.).

¹⁶ For more information see www.donau-quality.at

Another study was conducted in 2010, which included a comparison of the desires of the participants to the desires of parents who did not participate.

Selected results (AIF-studies 2006 and 2010):

In 2004/2005 about two thirds of parental education activities involved parents with small children (up to six years). From a total of 1853 activities, 337 dealt with the topics “pregnancy and birth” and “all around the baby”. About 27% of the supply was conducted as parent-child-groups; nearly the same percentage went for lectures.

Most of the groups and courses were conducted in the evening (53%), 30% took place in the morning (mostly parent-child-groups for parents – chiefly mothers – on parental leave). The cost of two thirds of these courses did not exceed 20 €, 9.6% cost no more than 10 €, and 26.4% were offered at no cost.

Not surprisingly, the participants are largely female. The percentage of the male participants was about 13% in 2004/2005. In 59% of the courses, groups and lectures, there were exclusively female participants. Fathers (or expectant fathers) obviously take part in prenatal classes but they can rarely be found at activities for (very) young children like parent-child-groups. Fathers prefer block courses (32.5% male participants) but very seldom go to continuing courses, e.g. once a week (4.9% male participants).

The analysis of the questionnaires for participants (2006) revealed that more than one third of the participants (37%) were mothers on maternity or parental leave. Three quarters of the participants lived in a family in which the youngest child was not older than five.

82% regarded the costs as reasonable. 12% were willing to pay more. No connection with to household income could be found. The 2010 study showed a similar result, and it was revealed that about 10 to 15% were not willing to pay for parental education services at all, independent from the household income.

In the study of 2010 12.6% of the non-participants (parents who have not taken part in parental education-activities yet) said that they had never heard of “parental education” before. Nearly 15% said they had heard of it but didn’t know exactly what it was. 40.7% of the participants said they knew about parental education activities within reach. Parents who had not yet used parent education services gave the following reasons: “lack of time” (34.1%), “I have never thought about something like that” (31.1%), “I prefer other ways to get information on parenting” (24.4%) and “I think I know enough about parenting” (20.7%). People with very low education (only compulsory school) were (nearly) the only ones who said “I can’t afford it (financially)” which indicates that people with a low education and probably also a low income don’t even think of using parental education offerings because of financial reasons, without being informed about the costs.

A comparison between participants and non-participants showed that the motivation for using parental education services is similar. For both groups “to be prepared for educational challenges” was the most important reason, followed by “learning about the development and behaviour of children”. However, “exchange with other parents” was much more important for participants, obviously because they had experienced that as part of parental education offerings, while non-participants more often pictured lectures and listening to a speaker.

Regarding the group-leader, for non-participants the prerequisite that she or he should be a mother or father her/himself, was much more important than for the people who had already attended parental education offerings.

For the purpose of evaluation and monitoring, as well as for giving feedback to the counselling offices, the Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth conducts an annual statistical audit. At the end of the year, each counselling office has to provide the Ministry with a brief account of each client. This account includes information about the purpose of the counselling (e.g. divorce, educational questions, violence, sexual issues), statistical data (e.g. age, education, place of living), how the client became aware of the counselling office or by whom he/she was referred, and how the counselling was ended (e.g. solving of the problem, pressure was decreased).

Family Counselling

Also in the interest of quality assurance, there is financial assistance available to cover the cost of regularly supervising the multiprofessional teams that make up family counselling offices.

Quality control among the providers of “other services” is secured by the legislative framework which mandates a well-grounded education consisting of theoretical and practical elements. Furthermore, practicing psychotherapists and social counsellors are obliged to participate regularly in supplementary education.

Other services

5 Good Practice Examples in Austria

Two examples of good practice in parenting support will be highlighted in the following section. They are: (1) The Intercultural Parents' café (*Interkulturelles Elterncafé*), mainly coordinated by Vienna's *Kinderfreunde* and (2) The "Adventure of being Grandparents" (*Abenteuer Großeltern sein*), by *Katholisches Bildungswerk Steiermark*. Both programs are enjoying considerable success in Austria. The institutions that run them are two of the largest providers of parenting programs, and act nationwide. Hence, when they identify a good-practice program, existing networks can be used to rather easily implement it in other locations.

The information outlined in the following sections has been gathered in collaboration with the main representative of each organization, namely Brigitte Lackner (Forum Katholische Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich)¹⁷ and Günther Leeb (*Kinderfreunde*). We have both interviewed them and also used text based information that they provided, including material on internal evaluations.

At this point, we would like to quickly address the topic of "reconciliation of work and family". Eurofound had specified a particular interest in this topic, and we hence set out to find good practice models based on this theme. Our search did not uncover a program that could be considered a good practice model. Especially the innovation of workplace-based parent education (*betriebliche Elternbildung*) did not live up to the high expectations. Both organizations document that their respective programs did not receive enough attention from companies and were therefore discontinued. It is hypothesized that the economic crisis might be held responsible for the companies' decline of interest to pay for such programs (Lackner 2010:16).

5.1 Case study 1: Intercultural Parents' café

This project was chosen as an example for good practice because it successfully integrates a group of parents that is usually not easily reached in parenting support programs: Mothers and fathers who have immigrated from less wealthy countries, who are often of lower social status and do not speak Austria's dominant language. The weekly meetings are multilingual and include both presentations of invited experts (e.g. about healthy food, the difficult phase of puberty) and discussions among participants. The staff is fluent in the languages most relevant to this group, i.e. Turkish and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS), and they can thus reduce or eliminate possible language barriers. By implementing the parent's café in the school building that their children attend, the program aims to motivate communication between school (teachers) and parents, which ultimately contributes positively to their children's educational development. The program has been introduced in October 2011 and has been running successfully since then. About 15 to 20 parents are participating in the weekly meetings,

Case Study 1

¹⁷ *Forum Katholische Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich* translates into: "Forum Catholic parent education in Austria". It is the umbrella organization for all Catholic parent education institutes, including *Katholisches Bildungswerk Steiermark*.

most of whom return regularly, according to the program's coordinator. Because of its success, other Austrian *Länder* have started to implement similar projects. Also, a similar project has been implemented for parents of children in kindergarten-age.

Project coordinators

The project is mainly coordinated by Kinderfreunde Austria and is part of their intercultural initiative "gemeinsam" (in translation: "together"). The non-profit organisation has branches in every of the nine *Länder*. The Kinderfreunde have been founded in 1908 and have become one of the largest suppliers of parenting programs. Throughout Austria, around 8.500 people (employees and volunteers) are working for Kinderfreunde. Vienna's Kinderfreunde have about 2.000 people. They have a section for intercultural projects and parent education which is headed by Günther Leeb. The latter is also the main coordinator of Vienna's Elterncafé, and had the initial idea to set up such a program. It is part of the Kinderfreunde's initiative for intercultural work and diversity-mainstreaming.

In arranging the weekly Elterncafé, Kinderfreunde are cooperating with the school HS/KMS Brüsslgasse. This is a public school for pupils between 10-14 years. It is located in the 16th district of Vienna, an area with a high percentage of people with a migration background. Many families of the school children here have emigrated from Turkey or countries that stem from former Yugoslavia (BCS-countries). The school is providing room facilities and is also involved on a personnel level: Several teachers are taking part in the meetings, and there is ongoing feedback between the school principal and the coordinators of Elterncafé.

The Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)¹⁸ is another project partner and provides funding. The Austrian Integration Fund was founded in 1960 by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Austria's Federal Ministry of the Interior (BM.I). Their mission is to "foster the linguistic, professional, and social integration of migrants in Austria."¹⁹ It was the Austrian Integration Fund who originally had the idea to start activities that would benefit the parents of the school HS/KMS Brüsslgasse. They wanted to improve communication between certain groups of parents and the school personnel. For the implementation of an appropriate measure, the Austrian Integration Fund awarded an order to the Kinderfreunde, knowing that they have experience in that kind of social work.

Background and objectives

Günther Leeb is the initiator of Elterncafé. In our interview, he says that he has been inspired by some projects that have been successfully running in Germany for many years, especially the so called "Rucksackmütter Recklinghausen".²⁰ This is a programme where Turkish and German women meet in weekly playgroups for their children. The aim is to develop an intercultural understanding for each other. Also, there are parent education meetings for Turkish mothers that take place in their native language, at the kindergarten/school. He says,

¹⁸ Please note that their institute's abbreviation (ÖIF) is the same as ours (Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung, ÖIF). In order to prevent confusion in this report, we will not use their abbreviated but their full name.

¹⁹ http://www.integrationsfonds.at/en/about_us/mission_statement/

²⁰ www.u-braun.de/veroeff42.htm

this project has inspired him to arrange a meeting place for migrated individuals where their mother tongue is spoken and where they can communicate and receive information on issues that are important in their daily life as parents of schoolchildren.

The project's main objective is the idea to "use" a multilingual setting so that migrated parents who are not fluent in the dominant language will receive a better understanding of the school system (in their native language), intensify communication with teachers and other parents, and will ultimately contribute to their children's positive educational attainment. In the multilingual setting, the main language (e.g. used in presentations) is German, and the two seminar leaders translate into the other languages, mostly Turkish and BCS.

The concept to include parents of (potentially) disadvantaged school children derives from findings in research that shows that children with migration background profit in their educational attainment when there is extra support in their communication with the school. Especially those who come from lower socio-economic milieus – which is often the case among migrants from Turkey and the BCS-countries – are less active in their children's school activities while "parents from high socio-economic milieus have been found to create a more school-supportive child-rearing environment" (Driessen 2005:513). In order to involve these parents in their children's school, concepts that are tailored to their needs are essential. But (López 2001) have pointed out that parental involvement studies usually focus too much on the "general population" and how to involve them. Their own qualitative longitudinal study on migrant families suggests that concepts are most effective when they concentrate on the specific *needs and questions* of the parents and integrate *informal involvement* (López 2001). The Interkulturelles Elterncafé project does just this, as it meets the parents' language needs, focuses on their specific questions, and includes informal elements, such as soccer games and a little party at the end of the school year.

Target group

The target group are mothers and fathers of children (10-14 years) who attend the public school which hosts the meetings. The Elterncafé is open to every parent, whether or not they have a migration background. But mostly, parents who have ethnic roots in Turkey and the BCS-countries are the ones who accept the invitation. It should be mentioned here that "migration background" does not refer only to recent migrants. Also those who have spent many years (or their whole life) in Austria can still profit from a multilingual setting that improves all their languages, i.e. German and other languages they use in daily life.

Parents are invited via information flyers that are handed out to the children in school to take them home. Flyers are also given directly to parents who wait in front of the school building to pick up their children. Information flyers were multilingual (in German, Turkish, BCS, English, other languages, if needed). Also, district newspapers had placed ads, and people working in other institutions (e.g. communal offices, after-school care-club) had volunteered to pass on information about the Elterncafé program to parents in an informal way.

General setting and accessibility

The Elterncafé is open along the school year and it is closed during vacation time. This year's Elterncafé (i.e. the first one ever) opened October 4, 2011, and the school year ended with a little party on June 19, 2012.

Place: A public school in the 16th district of Vienna. The parents meet in a room within the school library which is provided by the school. Parents sit around a big table or form a chair circle. Up front is a school blackboard.

Time: The meetings are once per week, every Tuesday from 5–7 p.m. It was planned to make it an afternoon meeting, but parents gave feedback that they would prefer the evening.

Form of meeting: There are different forms of meetings. Sometimes, the sessions are *open discussion rounds* where parents can choose what they would like to talk about. Or there are *sessions that feature a special topic*. Here, experts are invited to give input, and after their presentation is over, there is time for a round of open discussion. Also, there are *informal, leisure oriented, gatherings*, such as a soccer game of the children's fathers or a social gathering in winter where parents brought food specialties. Especially this latter event generated much interest, according to one coordinator.

Which topics? Topics talked about at the Elterncafé are both following the parents' wishes or are picked by the project coordinators.

Topics that were wished for by parents and resulted in invited expert's presentations included: Developmental psychology, puberty, sexuality, media behavior, health, nutrition, education, and returning to one's job after parental leave.

Also, the school had used the opportunity to provide information about its projects and events, and news on a local level (city or city district) that seemed relevant to the parents were distributed.

Moreover, parents were motivated to use or expand their language skills in both the German language as well as in the other language(s) used in their daily lives. They could audition books and games that have the aim to foster language skills in multilingual settings. There was also a fieldtrip to visit one of Vienna's public libraries.

Costs: Attendance is for free. Rather than paying, parents are "rewarded" for regular attendance. Those who are present at least ten times per year are granted a coupon worth € 100, which they redeem at the local adult education college (Volkshochschule) in order to take a language or similar course. Moreover, they receive a coupon worth € 5 for every visit, which they can redeem at a paper store to buy school supplies or similar.

Childcare service: Although the Elterncafé is targeted at parents, they can bring their children (the ones who attend the school as well as their siblings). There is space for them to play together in a separate room, supervised by an adult. This service is free of charge.

Staff

The Elterncafé is led by two women who are both accredited as so called "integration coaches". In addition, one of them has also been trained at Kinderfreunde to become an "intercultural Parent-child-group-leader". They both have first languages which are most present in the Elterncafé: Turkish and Serbo-Croatian. They are either employed or work under a freelance-contract. Staff and experts (who give presentations at Elterncafé) are paid by the Austrian Integration Fund.

Their role in the sessions is to ask the group for topics they want to discuss, invite experts to give presentations, moderate the group, motivate discussion, provide translations as needed to keep the parents involved in the discussion.

Evaluation and Outlook

A "good practice" of this project is its sensitivity to the needs of the participating persons (parents, staff), which were monitored not only after the project ended but also while it was still going on. For example, in order to stay in contact and receive feedback from staff, parents and teachers, the project's initiator joined the Elterncafé once per month. In addition, there were meetings, held every 6 to 8 weeks, in order to discuss the general concept, and both past and prospective sessions.

An interim report documented how the school's headmaster and the two leaders of the Elterncafé estimate the program's success. In an open questionnaire sent by e-mail, they were asked to write about both challenging areas and positive outcomes. Also the parents were asked for their experiences. They received questionnaires through which they could provide their own feedback. These are currently being analysed by an evaluation team at Kinderfreunde.

Some results of these evaluations and feedback include:

- The number of participants, and especially returning participants, was higher than the coordinators had expected, and document that this project is appreciated and well accepted.
- The Elterncafé has been found to be an efficient link between the parents, their kids and the school. One of the leaders of Elterncafé answered in her evaluation questionnaire about the relationship between school and parents:

"I do have the feeling that the parents showed a lot of interest in the school. Before (they had visited the Elterncafé), I think, they have not cared about school so much, their approach was different. But because of their regular attendance, they become more and more familiar with the school building. Also the children who come with them are pretty proud of the parents or just feel good because their parents show interest. This is the impression I got".²¹ (Wiener Kinderfreunde 2012b:6)

- The seminar leaders found it especially valuable when teachers would visit the Elterncafé as the dialogue between them and the parents was stimulated in a good way. In their evaluation forms, both the school's headmaster and the seminar leaders expressed the hope that in the future, even more teachers would participate.

²¹ The text is a translation of a written statement in German.

- Certainly, in such a diverse setting, the question of how to deal with cultural differences cause uncertainties, also for the seminar leaders. For example, some parents of Muslim religion had asked to hold their evening prayer at the school, so that they could make it to the Elterncafé in time. There was a discussion among the coordinators about how to deal with this request. While some said this should be OK, others pointed out that this would split the group. Especially in this field (dealing with cultural differences), training and supervision are important.

5.2 Case Study 2: Adventure of being grandparents

Case Study 2

This project also focuses on a specific group: grandmothers and grandfathers who take over care work for their grandchildren. Their role as professional caregivers has been made official in 2009 by the Austrian state. Since then, grandparents in Austria (as well as others) can be certified as "pedagogically trained individuals" who receive money for the care work they provide – from their own children, if they wish so – for which the latter can receive a tax deduction. The certification requires that grandparents complete four modules (i.e. 8 hours) of training, in which they gain and/or refresh their knowledge in topics related to the upbringing of children, communication issues, the role of rituals, the relationship with their own children, the development of society in their understanding of pedagogy, and others. The project is highlighted here because it runs very successfully and has recently expanded into all nine *Länder*. It is part of the so-called MARKE, a label that secures the quality of parenting support programs. This program also deserves attention on the level of societal awareness: In a time where a "lack of family bonds" is a subject of concern, such programs help to acknowledge and make visible these forms of inter-familial social security. It also gives an interesting input on a wider definition of parenting: In the understanding of *Forum Katholischer Erwachsenenbildung*, also Grandparenting is Parenting, made visible by using a big letter in between: GrandParenting (GroßElternbildung).

Project coordinators

The project is offered nationwide within the network *Forum Katholischer Elternbildung* in Österreich. Their parent support programs (Elternbildung) are one important branch of their work, and they are offered in all nine dioceses/Länder. Programs on offer are specific to their region, but there is extensive communication and exchange of ideas among them, especially because there is the national umbrella organisation of Catholic adult education. Brigitte Lackner is responsible for networking in Catholic parenting programs.

The project that was picked to be presented here ("Abenteuer Großeltern Sein") is specific to the Catholic education institute in the diocese of Graz-Seckau, situated in Styria (Steiermark). Similar projects have been implemented elsewhere. This one was chosen because of its long history - it started in 2001 - and is well documented in its setup. In Styria, the Catholic parent education is the biggest supplier of parent support programs in Austria. Their general manager is Ute Paulweber.

A definite strength of the project lies in the experience of the coordinators and their well-knit and stable system of educating their staff, evaluating the outcomes and transferring these experiences within the nationwide network. The program follows standardised internal guidelines ("MARKE") and internal and external evaluation criteria. MARKE is a quality label invented by the network of Catholic parenting programs. It stands for the German wording of "Mit Achtung und Respekt kompetente Eltern" (in translation: with esteem and respect competent parents). Seminars that are labeled with the MARKE logo share and understanding that they follow current findings and understandings in the fields of pedagogy, andragogy (i.e. learning strategies for adults), and education sciences. In an internal paper, Brigitte Lackner summarizes the fundamentals of MARKE and their educational seminars:

"The most important fundamentals are a humanistic approach, a person oriented and system oriented approach, intuitive parental competence as outlined by Papousek, recent neurobiological findings and legal basics such as the UN agreement on children's rights and funding guidelines of the BMWFJ²² for parent support programs." (Lackner 2012:1)

Both Ute Paulweber and Brigitte Lackner have agreed to provide us with public but also internal information so that the project can be described in detail. We used written material, such as general folders, media clippings, but also the most recent evaluation results of an ongoing project report. Also, we used oral information, as both managers were interviewed by telephone to provide additional information and personal experiences.

Background and objectives

The programme's first roots reach back into the year 2000 when in their annual meeting the diocese Graz-Seckau had the idea to offer seminars for grand-parents. One year later, following an internal workshop, the first seminars for grandparents had been developed and were launched at the same time in several parts of the country. They had been developed by Marlies Haderspeck and were named "Grandparents, the best idea since children exist". The seminars had three parts that dealt with (1) the historical changes about what it means to be a grandmother or grandfather, (2) the relationships between the generations, and (3) the specific role of being a grandparent.

The idea to integrate grandparents in parenting support programs has its roots in the understanding that their childcare is of special value for both their children and grandchildren. They are part of the family, have been the ones who have (usually) raised the mother or father of their grandchildren and know about some of those norms, values, and family rituals that are special to each family and which they might wish to preserve.

In a broader, societal context, childcare by grandparents does help to foster intergenerational communication and understanding in a family setting. Along the second half of the 20th century, sociologists have observed that intergenerational relations (parent-child, grandparent-grandchild) have been "emotionalized", i.e. the young generation is more open to accept the older generation as a cultural intermediary (Rosenmayr 2000: 236ff; Pfliegerl 2007:29ff), but also learning from each other has become more common: While in non-dynamic societies, the younger generation learns from the older one, in modern society, intergenerational learning (for both sides) seems desirable – even when this means that conflicts may evolve, because common grounds need to be negotiated (Kolland 2012). While, in former times, grandparents have mostly supported their grandchildren financially, there is now an understanding that they are also significant in providing emotional support as well. It hence seems valuable to "tickle" communication between the generations, and to do this in a way where grandparents gain awareness of their importance, but also how conflicts with their children (e.g. about the "right way" to raise a child) can be solved or evaded in the first place.

Seminars for grandparents have existed since 2001, but they gained new significance and shape in 2009 when a new federal law was enacted. Since then, grandparents (and other persons of age 16 or older) who are not living in the same household with the children, can

²² BMWFJ refers to the Austrian Ministry for Economy, family, and Youth (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend)

provide childcare services that are labelled as "professional" – as soon as they have successfully completed a specific program that certifies them as "pedagogically trained individuals". At that point, the already existing grandparent-seminars in Styria were adapted to meet the requirements of such a certification course, specifically directed at women and men who wanted to provide paid childcare services to their children/grandchildren. The benefit of the payment might not be obvious right away, but it lays in the fact that parents can file these costs in their annual tax report, just as they would do it with institutional childcare that they buy. Instead of paying for institutional childcare or babysitters, parents can "distribute" the money within their own family (to the older generation) and receive a special form of in-home childcare.

Target group

The project aims to reach men and women who provide childcare to their grandchildren. It is not only reserved to those who need to be certified so that their children can name them as professional caregivers in the annual tax report. The seminars focus on topics relevant for any grandparent who takes care of children.

The seminars are advertised via different media: on the internet, in newspapers, with posters and folders, but also through personal contacts. These play an important role, as some results from the ongoing evaluation study show: 13% have heard of these seminars when they had visited other seminars for parent education, and 27% have been invited personally, often during these events. Another 25% chose the answer "other" and could further explain the context. It showed that it was often their own children who suggested their parents would attend that very seminar. This means that about one fourth of the participants were there following the initiative of their children.

How participants learned from the seminar: Forms of advertising

Poster	3%
Folder	14%
Personal invitation	13%
Newspaper	13%
Internet homepage	6%
Other (mostly: suggestion by children)	25%

Source: (Brantner 2012: 9); n = 110

General setting and accessibility

The project is a "service" which can be bought by communities (city, church, etc.), companies or private persons, who will organise the time and place of the event.

Place: The seminars can be held in various locations. They take place in rooms that are chosen by event organisers. Usually, seminars take place in public seminar buildings, e.g. of the Catholic church, local community centres or in parent-child-centres. Whoever is organising the event is responsible for paying the rental fee.

Time: The complete course lasts 8 hours. It herewith meets the requirements to be eligible to certify its participants as "pedagogically trained individuals". The seminar is designed to take place either on 4 evenings or on 2 consecutive Saturdays. The second option is usually preferred.

Form of meeting: The meetings are discussion oriented, and input is given by the two seminar leaders. The latter follow a general principle for all seminars of the Katholisches Bildungswerk that stimulates self-learning processes rather than it uses up-front presentations. This is different from earlier forms of parent training. Now, it is the aim to activate the participants' competence which is understood to already be there but which profits from self-reflection and discussion with others. Three didactic aspects are stressed: transfer of knowledge, actual doing, and sharing of personal experiences with others. At the end of each meeting, participants are asked for oral or written feedback, which is used for ongoing evaluations.

Which topics? The seminars are set up in four consecutive modules:

Module 1: "My grandchildren and me"

Obviously, the role of being a grandparent has been changed along the past century. In this module, these changes are discussed. Participants are also encouraged to reflect their own role today. What does it mean to them to be a grandmother, a grandfather?

Module 2: "Bringing up children hand in hand"

This module reflects how grandparents and their children interact in terms of how to bring up the grandchildren. Sometimes, grandparents enjoy being less strict with their grandchildren (or the opposite) but cause confusion for the grandchildren who do not know which guidelines to follow. The task of this module is to reflect on how conflicts between the generations can be solved or evaded altogether.

Module 3: "How do I say it..."

In this module, it is discussed how differences in opinions are experienced, and how feelings of discontent can be communicated in a respectful and constructive way. It is important to be aware of recurring conflict patterns and to be able to deal with them.

Module 4: "This is what I would like to pass on to you..."

As significant others, grandparents pass on (consciously or unconsciously) family traditions, rituals, values and personal beliefs. In this module, participants reflect on which of these elements they wish to pass on to their grandchildren. Also, they are encouraged to think about new rituals to establish only between them and their grandchildren. They can be very personal, e.g. that the grandparent will always sing a special song with them or take a look at how the kid's rabbit is doing, and they will feed it a carrot together. Such rituals, as "tiny" as they might be, help establish a special bond between them and their grandchildren.

Costs: Participants usually pay € 15-20 for the whole course, but this depends on the decision of the organiser. For the service provided by the Katholisches Bildungswerk (i.e. the 8 hour seminar with two seminar leaders) they pay € 180. The organiser can either ask for a participation fee or look for a sponsor

to pay the event (e.g. the community, a bank or other company). The service can be provided at such low cost because it is subsidised by the federal ministry of family and also by the government of Styria.

There is also a special coupon system in Styria for parents, and this applies here: Each family with children receives two coupons per year, each worth €5, that can be used for participation in various seminars for parents. This seminar for grandparents is one of them.

Staff

Two certified parent educators lead the seminars. They have a background in education, have their own experience in being a grandparent, and they have been accredited as parent educators (Elternbildner) by the Katholisches Bildungswerk, following the guidelines by the Austrian Ministry. Practical experience in how to deal with groups is of great importance. Hence, before a parent educator trainer will give their first seminar, they will receive on-site training in each of the four teaching units. Together with an experienced seminar leader, they will collect experiences, which are later reflected upon with their mentor. Also, throughout the year, there are meetings among the instructors, so they can exchange experiences.

To become a certified parent educator, the complete course consists of 300 hours and is accredited with 14,5 ECTS by the Austrian The Academy of Continuing Education (www.wba.at).

Evaluation and Outlook

As already pointed out, one strength of the project is its ongoing evaluation process and adaptations since 2001, and also its embedding in the program of MARKE, which ensures that their self-formulated quality standards are met (see above, "project coordinator"). Also, since 2006 the project is ISO-certified, now with the standards of ISO 9001:2008. This is the certification which worldwide is used most often in the annual evaluations (internal and external). The external evaluation is performed by the organisation Quality Austria (www.qualityaustria.com).

For this specific report, we were allowed to take a look into the evaluation reports of the grandparent-seminars for the diocese Graz-Seckau, including their most recent one which is currently being prepared.

The following results should be highlighted:

- Overall, a great satisfaction among the participants is documented. Concerning the different topics, the needs of participants were mostly met: "Education now and then" (99% positive), "role of grandparents" (97% positive), "communication" (94% positive), "personal belief, values" (94% positive).²³

²³ Satisfaction for the question "did how the topics were dealt with meet your needs" was measured along a 4-level-scale: "yes", "rather yes", "rather no", "no". The answers "yes" and "rather yes" were aggregated for the above use of "positive".

- As for the seminar methods and didactic elements, participants especially enjoyed the exchange of personal experiences with other members of the group. We were told by one of the seminar leaders that the introduction of the "role playing"-method needs to be carefully considered – as is true for all groups they work with. Whether a group is ready for this kind of interaction does not so much differ by age or educational background. Rather, the experience of individual participants with this method is of importance. It needs and experienced (parent) educator to properly estimate which methods are best for each specific group of individuals.
- Especially since the integration of grandparental childcare in professional childcare services in 2009, there is a constant growth of participation rates in these seminars. Also men (i.e. grandfathers) are interested in the seminars and show bigger presence than in other forms of parenting support seminars.²⁴

Number of grandparent-seminars and participants 2001-2011

Year	Offered seminars	Participants		
		Total	Women ²⁵	Men
2001	4	44		
2002	3	42		
2003	3	29		
2004	6	66		
2005	3	33		
2006	5	66		
2007	1	10		
2008	2	15	12	3
2009	3	43	37	6
2010	8	96	89	17
2011	11	87	74	13

Source: (Paulweber 2012: 5)

- The group of grandparents is usually very diverse: there are young and old grandparents, some are just 40 years old, others have children who are "late" parents and just turned 40 themselves. Some take care of the children every day, others once per week. Some are in the labour force, others not (anymore), and are more flexible with time management. Also, family forms are different and determine the general contact between grandparents and their grandchildren, e.g. when a divorce causes an emotional and/or geographical distance between them and the grandchildren. It turns out that in heterogeneous seminar groups, it is important to establish an understanding that they still share "common ground". What they have in common is that their grandchildren are important to them, and that they care for them. To make visible this common ground usually establishes a sense of tolerance and respect among the participants, also in regard to different family structures.

²⁴ This statement by our informants is supported by another study evaluating participation in parent education programs in Austria (Bucheberner-Ferstl et al. 2011). Their study showed that the biggest group among men taking part in part in parenting support seminars were older than 50, whereas women are most likely to participate in the age between 36 and 40 (ibid.: 2011: 67, table 5).

²⁵ Before 2008, women and men were not counted separately, gender specific numbers are therefore missing.

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Latest Publications

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